

SAJANĪYA-SŪKTA (RV 2.12):  
SOME REMARKS ON ITS GENESIS

1. *Introduction*

The Rgveda (=RV) is the earliest IE literary document available to us. It has ten *Maṇḍalas* (Books) and the *Maṇḍalas* II-VII are said to be older than the remaining *Maṇḍalas*, i.e. I, VIII-X. The *Maṇḍalas* II-VII are known as "Family-Books", as they contain one or two or three "Family-Hymns"<sup>1</sup>. Gr̥tsamada is the ṛṣi (seer) of the *Maṇḍala* II and it is known as the "Gr̥tsamada-*Maṇḍala*"/"Gār̥tsamada-*Maṇḍala*". The *Sūkta* (hymn) No. 12 in this *Maṇḍala* is known as the "Sajanīya-sūkta", as it has a refrain (except the last one i.e. ṛc No. 15) "*Sajanāsa Indraḥ*" in all ṛcs except the last ṛc, i.e. to say No. 15 has the *Maṇḍala*-refrain "*suvīrāso vidatham ā vadema*". The hymn is in honour of Indra and it glorifies richly the heroic and cosmic deeds of Indra, the national god of the Vedic people.

There have been attempts to explain the origin and purpose of this hymn, but they do not seem to be satisfactory; hence an attempt is made in this paper to review them and suggest a possible purpose and reason of the origin of this *sūkta*.

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1. Vide M. WINTERNITZ, *History of Indian Literature*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1927, p. 57 ff. (translated into English by Mrs. S. Ketkar); J. GONDA, *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. I, Fasc. 1, Wiesbaden, 1975, p. 131.

## 2. Contents

The hymn speaks of Indra as surpassing all other gods, no sooner than he is born. His valour is great. Two worlds, heaven and earth, are said to tremble before him. Earth bends before him. He steadies the trembling earth and the agitated mountains. He unsteadies also all that is steady. He kills Ahi (Dragon) and releases the seven rivers (*sapta sindhavaḥ*) and cows from the enclosing of Vala. He produces fire (i.e. lightning) between the two rocks (i.e. clouds). He is a victor in the battles. He makes the *dāsa-varṇa* lie low. Sceptic and atheistic feelings and views about him are mentioned. He is *susīpra* (i.e. having handsome cheeks or lips) <sup>2</sup>. He is said to be *vajra-bāhu* as well as *vajra-hasta*. He helps his worshippers in the battles as well as those who press the Soma-juice and bakes the cake, etc. Prayers (*brāhmans*) are said to invigorate him. People call upon him variously in the battles. They are said not to win without him. He is a match for everybody. He helps the rich and the poor and punishes the sinner. Every thing is under his control. He creates the sun and the moon. He spurns Śambara, Rauhiṇa and Dānu. The hymn ends with his personal prayer coupled with the refrain of the *Maṇḍala*.

## 3. Analysis and observations

Ṛṭsamada has described in this hymn *karmāṇi aindrāṇi*, so forcefully and graphically, that one would like to know why the seer sings in praise so richly and forcefully, i.e. to know the occasion and the purpose of the composition of this hymn. The *Bṛhaddevatā* <sup>3</sup> gives a legend about its origin. This legend is noted by Veṅkaṭa-Mādhava and Sāyaṇa with approval in their *bhāṣyas* on this hymn.

### i. *Bṛhaddevatā-Account:*

The *Bṛhaddevatā* (4.66-68) is an earliest attempt to account for the origination of this hymn. It says that once Ṛṭsamada prac-

2. R. N. DANDEKAR, *Vedic Mythological Tracts*, Delhi, 1979, p. 160.

3. Śaunaka, *Bṛhaddevatā* 4.68 (p. 43) [edited by A. A. Macdonell, Delhi, 1965 (Indian Reprint)], A. A. Macdonell holds that it "could hardly be placed later than 400 B.C." (*Ibid.*, Introduction; pp. xxii-xxiii).

tised severe penance (*tapas*) and by the powers gained thereby he could assume Indra's form and wander in three worlds.

Two demons Cumuri and Dhuni of terrible prowlers armoured with weapons attacked him (*i.e.* Ṛtsamada) mistaking him for Indra. The seer being aware of the evil intentions of the demons proclaimed the heroic deeds of Indra with this hymn, suggesting thereby that he is not Indra, but he is the seer Ṛtsamada.

ii. *Account by Veṅkata-Mādhava* <sup>4</sup>

He quotes the Bṛhaddevatā-stanzas (4.66-68) without any comments as preface to his *bhāṣya* on RV 2.12.1. According to this legend as noted above the seer assumes the form of Indra and goes out of the sacrificial place.

iii. *Accounts according to Sāyaṇa*

Sāyaṇa introduces the Bṛhaddevatā-account with a prefatory remark: "*atra itihāsaḥ*" to his *bhāṣya* on the RV 2.12.1. He notes two more legends after quoting the Bṛhaddevatā-account. These two accounts are as follows:

(a) Once Vainya performed a sacrifice. Indra and other gods went to attend it. Demons (*daityas*) came there with an evil intention to kill Indra. On seeing them Indra assumed the form of Ṛtsamada and left the sacrificial place. Then that Ṛtsamada was worshipped. Now, when the real Ṛtsamada started leaving the sacrificial place, he was mistaken as Indra by the demons (*asuras*) and was surrounded by them. He told them that he was not Indra whom he described in the hymn under consideration. Thus according to this legend Indra assumes Ṛtsamada's form and leaves the sacrificial place.

(b) According to the other additional account, Indra was once alone at the sacrifice performed by Ṛtsamada. On coming to

4. Veṅkata Mādhava is placed in the second half of the 10th century A.D. and first half of 11th century A.D. and Sāyaṇa is placed in 14th Century A.D. Vide S. G. KANTAWALA, *Rgveda-bhāṣyakāra Veṅkata-Mādhava*, "Svādhyāya", Vol. 28, Nos. 1-2 (Published in August, 1993), p. 2.

know that Indra is lone, the demons surrounded him to attack him; but he assumed the form of Gr̥tsamada and left the place by the sacrificial path. Finding that Indra is delaying in coming out, they came in and on seeing the situation they understood that one, who went out earlier was Gr̥tsamada and one, who was present there, was Indra. They attacked "him", so the real Gr̥tsamada told them he was not Indra, but he was in reality the seer Gr̥tsamada.

From this it is clear that according to the first version the seer Gr̥tsamada assumes Indra's form by the power of the penance. According to the last two versions Indra assumes the form of the *ṛṣi* Gr̥tsamada, that is to say that the version – Nos. 2 & 3 run counter to the version No. 1. Sāyaṇa offers no explanation to mention the latter two versions; perhaps it is meant to indicate that Indra can assume any form<sup>5</sup>. In the versions 2 & 3 Indra does not appear as a hero, but he displays cowardly traits in him and this aspect is not warranted by the hymn under consideration. It is a heroic song wherein various heroic exploits are glorified<sup>6</sup>.

All these versions do not explain satisfactorily the reason/occasion of the composition of this hymn, as it does not support the attempts made.

In another attempt to account for the origination of this hymn the vocative *janāsaḥ* in the emphatic refrain "*Sa janāsa Indraḥ*" (st. 5) is construed as "an eloquent attempt on the part of Indra-followers to convince followers of Varuṇa of the greatness of Varuṇa and win them over to their side"<sup>7</sup>. It is quite possible to understand the vocative

5. Indra is known for his capability to assume different forms, vide e.g. RV 6.47.18 (*Indra māyābhiḥ pur rūpa tyate ... rūpaṇi rūpaṇi pratirūpo bhābhūva ī*).

6. V. G. RAHURKAR, *A Literary Evaluation of Gr̥tsamada-sūktas*, Kavirāja Abhinandana Grantha, ed. by B. R. Saksena; Lucknow, 1967, p. 29.

7. G. K. BHAT, *Vedic Themes*, Delhi, 1978, p. 25. This view is based on R. N. Dandekar's theory (which is an elaboration of Roth's theory), of supersession of Varuṇa by Indra, i.e. supersession of Varuṇa-worship by Indra-worship (*Vedic Mythological Tracts*, Delhi, 1979, pp. 167 ff.). Over and above this hypothesis, i.e. supersession of Varuṇa-worship by Indra-worship, G. K. Bhat puts forward two more hypotheses, viz (i) hypothesis of literary form and (ii) hypothesis of particular literary form in this connection. The "literary form" hypothesis refers to the threefold classi-

*janāsaḥ* (O men !) to refer to the followers of the seer-poet Ḡṛtsamada, who tries to convince the people of the greatness of Indra <sup>8</sup>.

The above-going hypotheses to explain the occasion and purpose of the hymn are not satisfactory.

It is well-known that the RV is a book of prayers, hymns and these prayers-hymns sing the greatness, benevolence, various acts and deeds etc. of different deities. They are marked by religious sensitivity, unrestrained praise and devotion to the deity concerned. All these characteristics are reflected in this hymn. Incidentally it may be noted the other Vedas, *eg.* *Vājasaneyi-Saṁhitā* (20.54), sing that Vasiṣṭhas praise and salute Indra with hymns (*abhyarcanty arkaiḥ*).

In a *stotra* (prayer) of later times the following features are noticeable. There is a hearty request to a deity, description of its greatness, desire for reward, annulment of sins etc. It is characterised by devotional feelings and spirit of humility. Structurally it is uniformly in one metre. Every stanza is independent of other stanzas (preceding or succeeding) from the construction-point of view and the thought-point of view. In the descriptive portions there are references to legends. From this point of view it may be observed that the present hymn tends to satisfy to a larger extent the above-going requirements of a *stotra*.

The hymn under consideration is in honour of the great god, the supreme and national god of the Vedic Aryans, *i.e.* Indra. It describes very vividly his various heroic and benevolent deeds and cosmic activities. The whole hymn is in one metre only, *i.e.* the *triṣṭup* metre. Every stanza is independent of the other stanzas, *i.e.* they are self-sufficient and complete from the point of view of meaning, contents and thought. It has references to some legends and enemies of Indra, like Śambara, Vṛtra, Rauhiṇa etc.<sup>9</sup> The "seven rivers" (*sapta sindhavaḥ*)

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cation of *ṛc* in Yāska's, *Nirukta* (7.1) and the "particular literary form" hypothesis takes the hymn as an address by Ḡṛtsamada to the people who can be imagined for the purpose of literary form – to have gathered together to hear his inspired and eloquent address. (*ibid.*, pp. 25-27). He explains the doubt about Indra in *ṛc* 5 as a trick of effective eloquence (*ibid.*, p. 26).

8. Vide H. D. VELANKAR, *Rk-sūkta-śatī*, Bombay, 1972, p. 129. Cf. also *śrad asmai dhātā* / RV. 2.12.5. Vide also J. GONDA, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

9. On some enemies of Indra, vide G. K. BHAT, *op. cit.*, pp. 55 ff.

and their release is also mentioned. The seer's desire to be dear to Indra and to sing a song loudly and firmly in the *vidatha* ("divine worship"/"sacrificial assemblies"/"synod") and to be also blessed with heroic and vigorous sons is also met with. The god is said to protect the worshippers and the prayer (*bráman*) is said to invigorate the god here, Indra. From a structural point of view it may be noted that the beginning *pāda* (line) of every *ṛc* (stanza) draws reader's attention, as it begins with any case-form of the relative pronoun *yad*. The device is striking and as such, a beginning like this adds to the consolidation of power of praise, effectiveness and strikingness. It is the *ṛṣi*'s (seer-poet's) attempt to introduce a novel striking way in poetical compositions: in the *bhakti*-compositions. Viewed from these points of view the hymn is a forerunner of later literary form of poetry known as the *stotras* and especially beginning with any case-form of the relative pronoun *yad*. In this connection the prayer to the goddess in Chapter 5 (5.14 ff.) of the *Śaptaśatī* in the *Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa* "*yā devī sarva-bhūteṣu Viṣṇu-rūpeṇa śabditā / namas tasyai namo namaḥ //*" may be cited here.

All this tends to suggest that the whole hymn in its form and structure represents an attempt of the seer-poet to provide a new, effective and forceful literary form of *bhakti*-poetry which could be a forerunner of several *stotras* and other stanzas of later times. From the *ṛṣi*'s point of view it reflects upon his innovative literary art of composition.